MERCHANDISING

Computer-animated animals work for pizza parlor

A rambunctious and charming cast of computer-animated characters has been created to cajole, delight and entertain young and not-so-young San Jose, Calif., residents visiting the recently opened Pizza Time Theatre in the city's Blossom Hill district.

Billed as America's largest pizza parlor—19,000 square feet—the 200-seat operation boasts an array of pizzas, sandwiches, salads and beverages plus a "make-it-yourself" ice cream sundae bar.

While munching pizzas, customers can revel in the vociferous antics of a roster of original cartoon personalities led by Chuck E. Cheese, alias "The Big C", a street-wise rat who acts as emcee.

Others include Mr. Munch, a purple pizza eater who pilfers pizzas from Chef Pasqually—an Italian baritone given to announcing birthdays and special occasions.

The talent lineup features banjo-strumming, country-singing hound Jasper T. Jowls; the sultry-voiced Mopsey Sisters, a swinging, singing, American-as-apple-pie trio bent on challenging the Supremes for vocal recognition; and Helen Henny, an "occasional" guest start "who comes to San Jose direct from a triumphal tour of Madagasgar."

The 4-ft.-high, three-dimensional; computer-controlled cartoon characters are mounted in gold gilt frames above the atrium in the dining area and surrounded by animated pots and pans and waving flags. Their voices, along with the original musical score, are synchronized to animated movements.

Shows run every eight minutes with predictable interruptions for birthday cheers and skits.

Headlining adult entertainment is a more imposing personality, the incomparable Ms. Dolli Dimples who holds court at the ivories in the 100-seat piano bar. Ms. Dimples, a full-sized, animated hippopotomas, delivers a repertoire of more than 20 medleys in her own unique "Mae West" style.

In addition to the entertainment, the pizza parlor has an arcade called the Fantasy Forest Game Preserve, equipped with 100 video, pinball and arcade games, and a special free area for tiny tots furnished with a cheese slide, rocking horses and puppy pong games. The operation also has a private dining area for up to 150.

Party packages for birthdays, anniversaries and special occasions include an appearance by Chuck E. Cheese, computer-led cheers and sing-alongs, and free game tokens to play the coin-operated machines.

Pizza Time Pres. Gene N. Landrum describes the operation as a Disneyland "carried to American families at the local level." In fact, he states, "It's the only place outside of Disneyland where people can enjoy a computer-animated show."

The Theatre's animation program is the result of a $1.5 million development effort centering around extensive use of sophisticated hardware and software. All cartoon characters and other animated figures are microprocessor-controlled with interface systems to tape decks and a mini computer.

Pizza Time Theatre is the company's second unit (the first is also in San Jose) and marks the beginning of a long-range plan to open 1,000 more across the United States over the next five years. A third unit debuted in Concord's Willows Shopping Center in March and a fourth and fifth are slated for Stockton and Sacramento in June. Franchises are under consideration for Marin County and the San Joaquin Valley.

If successful, the proposed chain, based in Cupertino, Calif., would be the only national fast-food outlet capable of handling large groups because each unit will average between 8,000 and 10,000 square feet. ☐



Ms. Dolli Dimples, a computerized hippo, plays piano at Pizza Time Theatre's piano bar in San Jose, Calif.

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